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Jessie West: My name is Jessie West. I came to Tampa in 1925, and it was the Depression on in 1930. You couldn't get a job; some didn't have no food to eat. Later on there were places where people could go and get food, and that helped out a lot.

Otis Anthony: Was this the soup lines?

JW: Yeah, the soup lines. And they had something they called the WPA [Works Progress Administration], and that was where they would give you groceries, and that helped out. And then after they changed presidents things got better, and things have been getting better ever since.

OA: The question I want to ask you, where were the soup lines located?

JW: Well, they had some in West Tampa. You could go up there and get soup—course, I never did get in lines, but people would go up in West Tampa somewhere. I never did go to get none. My husband was living at the time, and we never did go up there. Not that we didn't need it, we needed it, but he wouldn't go. He wouldn't go in. I didn't know how to do it, so we didn't get any.

OA: Ms. West, how was the housing conditions when you came here?

JW: Oh, it wasn't hardly no better. We had to get a room, get some people, until we could find a house. We found a house way out in Belmont Heights section out there. Stayed out there a while, and then moved back over to West Tampa.

OA: How was the people treated as far as job are concerned? Where were most of the jobs that blacks had to work?

JW: WPA jobs. WPA opened up some jobs, far as I can understand. There's not too much

I know about Tampa, but it was pretty rough for a colored man getting a job. And also white ones, too—poor class white people, they had a time, too.

OA: Can you describe the Depression? How was it?

JW: People couldn't get no food, couldn't get no jobs. Poor class white people couldn't and the rich people, they wouldn't hire you. They had money but they wouldn't hire nobody. They said they would do the work themselves.

OA: Do you recall that—you was here when the soldiers came, right?

JW: The soldiers? What soldiers?

OA: When the soldiers came here around 1930, 1935. Do you recall the Tampa riot in the 1930s?

JW: Oh, yes, I remember. I remember the riots, yes, I do. But I can't think what year it was now. A riot on Central Avenue, one in West Tampa.

OA: Can you tell us what they were doing during the riots? Anything like that?

JW: Breaking store windows and some were stealing and beating up one another. I came to Tampa in 1925. My husband sent for me; he was working down here and he sent for me. I had five children and we couldn't find a house to live in. We had to get a room with some people. They was very nice. We got along nice together until we found a place in Belmont Heights. We lived in Belmont Heights a while, and then we moved back to West Tampa. My husband died in 1949.

OA: Do you remember World War I? Can you describe how blacks were treated during this time and what was happening?

JW: World War I? Not too much I know about that. I was married already. I was living in Quincy—that's my home. I was living there.

OA: Can you tell me some of things in Quincy? Particularly about segregation?

JW: I can tell you about that. Oh, yes, the white people was mean to the colored people. They would lynch them. There's no need to talk about it.

OA: That's important.

JW: They would lynch the colored people, I guess for nothing. And they would hang people there on the gallows. People from far and near would come to town to see the hanging. And they lynched the colored boy that was well known in Quincy and they lynched him for nothing, I guess. Everybody said it was for nothing. He was fishing, and it was a white lady out fishing too, in the woods. They accused this colored man of going

with the white lady and they put him in jail and they killed him—they electrocuted him and they tied his body to a truck and drug him all around town so everybody could see him.

OA: What year this was?

JW: I think it was—I don't know exactly.

OA: Can you estimate? Was it 1917?

JW: I believe it was around 1918. I think it was along in there. Wasn't nothing done to them. I don't care what they do to colored people, they didn't do nothing about it. And they worked them in the fields and didn't pay them nothing, gave them a small salary. Didn't have no kind of privilege. They didn't have the privilege that people have now, nothing like that.

OA: How were the young ladies treated?

JW: Oh, they would treat them all right. Treat the colored ladies nice; it was just the colored men. They'd have to work for nothing, almost.

OA: The men and the women had to work in the fields?

JW: Yeah, men and women worked in the fields. Some of them stayed on the farms. They had little houses built for them to live in. Some of them stayed and helped them to farm, helped the white man do all his farming, and they stayed in the little huts and didn't have to pay no rent. But they worked for such small wages they wasn't hardly getting nothing. The salary was very small.

OA: This was in 1918?

JW: Nineteen seventeen and 1918. It was bad. I hate to talk about it.

The voting. They used to have meetings. Some man would come there and have a meeting. They didn't want the colored people to vote. And this man would have a meeting at a church, and the white people would get on to it and they would take this man and carry him out somewhere out in the wood and beat him. If not, they would give him so many hours to get out of town. They'd beat them. They beat one preacher almost to death.

One man left town; he had a business there and had a home, and he never did come back. They wanted to vote and the white people said they didn't have no right to vote. So, there was people come in there and he was telling them that they can vote, they have a right to vote and showing them the light and things. The white people, they tried to break it up. Now the colored people is voting; we have our privilege to do things they didn't have no privilege to do way back then.

OA: When you came to Tampa did you ever recall anybody being hung or lynched here?

JW: No, no, I didn't. If they did, I don't remember.

OA: How would you compare segregation in Quincy as in Tampa?

JW: Well, it's better here in Tampa, the segregation is. But the people is waking up in Quincy; there's a lot of people up there that have as much voice to speak as these people down here, last time I was up there. Things had changed so—it was different; people was more enlightened and they had better privileges. It was almost as good as it is here now, from what I could see then.

OA: When you came here in 1925, were there any black schools here?

JW: Yes, yes.

OA: Can you name any of them?

JW: Dunbar. That's the only one I know of.

OA: Do you recall anything about the shipyards or railroads?

JW: No.

OA: Okay, Ms. West.

end of interview